



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ABBOTS AND ABBESSES OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER
OF STRICT OBSERVANCE (THE TRAPPISTS)**

Thursday, 19 September 2002

1. The meeting of the two General Chapters of the venerable Cistercian Order of Strict Observance gives me the pleasant opportunity of meeting you, dear abbots, abbesses and representatives of the Trappist monks and nuns.

Thank you for this visit with which you desire to renew your faithful loyalty to the Successor of Peter. I greet each one of you with affection. I especially thank Fr Bernardo Olivera who has expressed your common sentiments and illustrated the purpose and objectives of your meeting.

Through you, I greet the confreres and sisters of your monasteries in every part of the world. The Pope is grateful to you because, from the silence of your cloisters, you offer an unceasing prayer for his ministry and for the intentions and needs of the entire ecclesial community.

2. Dear brothers and sisters! In these days, you have gathered to reflect on how to ensure that your common spiritual heritage while keeping its original spirit intact may be more responsive to the needs of the present time. Humanity, following up on the recent tragic events whose anniversary we observe these days, seems confused and in search of certainties: it longs for truth, it aspires to peace.

But where should we seek a sure refuge if not in God? Only in divine mercy - as I recalled in my recent journey to Poland - can the world find peace and the human person happiness. Down through the ages, your monasteries have been extraordinary witnesses to this secret, hidden from the learned and the clever but revealed to children (cf. *Mt 11,25*).

In fact, from the beginning, the Cistercians have been distinguished by a sort of "*mystical*

passion", showing how the sincere search for God on an austere ascetical path leads to the ineffable joy of the spousal union with him in Christ. In this regard St Bernard teaches that those who thirst after the Lord no longer have anything of their own and henceforth have all in common with God. He adds that the soul, in this situation, "*it is not for liberty that she asks, nor for an award, not for an inheritance nor even knowledge, but for a kiss [of God]. It is obviously the request of a bride who is chaste, who breathes forth a love that is holy, a love whose ardor she cannot entirely disguise*" (Bernard, *Super cantica canticorum*, 7,2; *Song of Songs I*, p. 39, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, Michigan 1981).

3. This lofty spirituality keeps its full value as a witness in today's cultural situation, which all too often kindles the desire for deceptive goods and artificial paradises. Dear brothers and sisters, in fact your vocation is that of witnessing with your life of recollection in Trappist houses to the high ideal of holiness summed up in an unconditional love for God, infinite goodness, and, as a reflection, a love that in prayer mystically embraces all humanity.

Your distinctive life style clearly emphasizes these two basic structural coordinates of love. You do not live as hermits in a community, but as cenobites in a special kind of desert. God manifests himself in your personal solitude, as well as in the solidarity that unites you to the members of the community. You are alone and separated from the world in order to advance further on the path of divine intimacy. At the same time, you share this spiritual experience with other brothers and sisters in a constant balance between personal contemplation and union with the liturgy of the Church.

Keep this charismatic patrimony unchanged! It constitutes a treasure for the entire Christian people.

4. Today, the growth of the Order, especially in the Far East, brings you into contact with the different religious traditions, a fact that obliges you to engage in a wise and prudent dialogue, so that everywhere the one light of Christ may shine out in the plurality of cultures. Jesus is the radiant Sun of whom the Church must be the faithful reflection, in accord with the expression "*mysterium lunae*" (mystery of the moon), an expression that the Fathers cherished. This task, as I wrote in my Apostolic Letter "*Novo Millennio ineunte*", makes one tremble if one takes human weakness into account, but becomes possible when one is open to the renewing grace of God (cf. n. 55).

Brothers and sisters, do not be discouraged with the difficulties and trials, no matter how painful they might be. In this regard, I am thinking of the seven monks of Notre-Dame d'Atlas, in Tibhirine, Algeria, who were brutally killed in May 1996. May the blood shed be the seed of many holy vocations for your monasteries in Europe, where the aging of the communities of monks and nuns is more noticeable, and in other parts of the world where there is a greater urgency of ensuring the formation of many aspirants to Cistercian life. I also hope that a more organic coordination of the different branches of the Order will make more significant the witness to your common charism.

5. "*Duc in altum!*" (Lk 5,4). Dear Brothers and Sisters, I also address to you Jesus' invitation to put out into the deep; this invitation re-echoed once again for the entire Christian people at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Do advance without fear on the road you have taken, encouraged by the "good zeal" of which St Benedict speaks in his Rule, putting absolutely nothing before Christ (cf. chap. LXXII).

May the prudent Virgin Mary, accompany you and, with her, may the Order's saints and blessed protect you. The Pope assures you of his constant remembrance in prayer while he cordially blesses those of you present and your monastic communities.